

IONA SCHOOL FOR MINISTRY



Narrative and Choices

Seniors
February 2022
Rev. Samantha Smith

Study Guide

My students often accuse me of asking “cosmic questions.” The cosmic questions, however, are simply asking what is the pattern in the answers we give to the ordinary questions of our daily lives.”

- Sedgewick

- What are moral or ethical questions?

- Moral or Ethical questions are referential in nature
 - They *refer* an action or a dilemma that confronts us in some or many directions
 - They challenge us to render accounts of what is, what is not, what should be, what should not be.
 - They are intimately interwoven with the governing narratives that generate reality for us.
 - In this sense, moral or ethical questions are cosmic.
- Moral and Ethical questions always refer back to STORIES
 - Stories are the building block of realities
 - Stories are how human beings integrate the facts of life and make meaning from them
 - Stories are exercises in subjectivity and dominance: They form us more than we form them, and they interpret facts more often than facts amend them.

- Life as Living Words - Narrative

- One of the fundamental assumptions of Christian theology is that language makes reality, rather than describes it
 - This is why stories are so powerful. They are the repeated use of language to invoke what they describe.
 - This is also why prayer and liturgy are so fundamental to Anglicanism - words shape reality, we pray ourselves into belief
 - The clearest practical example of this power is the Eucharist.
- A result of this account of language is pluralism – the coexistence of radically different narrative realities all transpiring at the same time.
 - Christian Ethics – that is the practice of negotiating this pluralism, requires some knowledge of our own stories, and the answers our stories predispose us to give to moral and ethical questions.

- **Life as Responding to Words - Choices**

- The study and practice of Christian Ethics is first and foremost about embodied living, about the nature of the Christian life, and can only be understood through incarnated practice.
 - If many stories are True, and an infinite number of future stories could be True, how does our practice make sense of what Truth our stories offer us?
 - Choices become a response to both cosmic and intimate word-realities, holding paradox and plurality which leaves us always in the grey - never in black or white.

- This class will encourage you to view choices, your own and others, as incarnated stories, rather than as discrete events. Only when we begin to understand the semiotic freight behind our actions, can we begin to think ethically.

- The Christian ethical perspective taught in this class takes as a given two facts about life as Living Stories:
 - Truth is plural and paradoxical, even when we go to great lengths to ensure that it is simple and universal.

Truth is indeterminate: it is never simply a matter of fact.